

**Opening Statement  
Of  
Chairman Henry Hyde**

**Full Committee Hearing  
“Lebanon Reborn? Defining National Priorities and Prospects for Democratic Renewal in  
the Wake of March 14, 2005 ”**

**2172 Rayburn House Office Building  
July 28, 2005**

The Committee will come to order.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to understand the nature of the U.S. commitment and policy objectives in Lebanon. The hearing also seeks to identify indigenous national priorities that seek to strengthen Lebanon’s unity and help transcend confessional boundaries that have historically led to deadlock and stalemate in the national decision making process.

A glimpse of this unity was exemplified on March 14, 2005 when one million protestors filled Beirut’s Martyr’s Square in an “independence uprising.” The protestors were united in denouncing the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (Rah-feek Ha-reer-ee), whose death launched a series of reactions that temporarily surpassed the country’s sectarian boundaries. Media images of Lebanon’s youth seeking the truth about their fallen leader and demanding that Syria leave were beamed into households across the world. A variety of cliché portrayals were given. Some called it the “Cedar Revolution” in honor of Lebanon’s national cedar tree that adorns its flag. Others called it the “Gucci Revolution” in tribute to the Westernized depiction of the protestors. Nonetheless, no matter what it was called, what mattered most was that the Lebanese people were gathered in reverence for their country’s sovereignty and independence.

Soon after, the Syrian regime withdrew its troops from Lebanon’s borders, and Lebanon’s political process began. Despite the inability to establish a representative electoral law, Lebanese overwhelmingly supported that parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2005 take place on time. Although not perfect, the elections were labeled as a “milestone on the road

to change” by U.S. Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. However, the political compromises that were made as a result of sectarian constraints in the weeks leading up to parliamentary elections were seen as a contradiction of the spirit of the “independence uprising” and have contributed to a growing disenchantment about the realization of the ideals established on March 14, 2005.

Lebanon today stands at a precipice. Faced with the chance to liberate itself from the yoke of Syrian oppression, Lebanon has the opportunity to transcend internal divisions and define a set of national priorities that will help guide the way toward Lebanon’s rebirth.

The international community stands ready to assist Lebanon in this process. However, that will only be possible if Lebanon is able to articulate a united voice in support of development policies that will subsequently lead to its long-term security and stability. Lebanon has a wealth of resources to utilize in this endeavor. A strong civil society, a free press, and an educated youth are Lebanon’s greatest assets. What remains to be answered is how the government will collaborate with these elements in crafting a set of national priorities.

I am encouraged by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora’s (Foo-add Sin-yoras) statements to Secretary Rice regarding reform. I hope that the newly-formed Lebanese government realizes the benefits of a political process that seeks to initiate institutional political, judicial and economic reforms. A government whose institutions do not reflect the merit and talent of their people cannot possibly liberate itself from human stagnation. Most of all, it cannot effectively govern the people it is meant to serve.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the United States has worked with the Lebanese people to help implement a variety of projects to help support these objectives. However, the \$35 million a year that is spent by the United States through non-governmental organizations is a challenging task in light of the \$35-40 million a month reportedly spent by Hizballah in the development sector. I look forward to hearing from the Administration about how the U.S. Agency for International Development can further support Lebanon’s capacity to advance reform and other requirements the Lebanese government is expected to implement under international law.

The Lebanese are a resilient people, and they have endured many struggles in their attempts to be free of all foreign forces. For too long, Lebanon's fate was reduced to the might and will of external forces in the region. Now is the time for the Lebanese to stop being followers of external ambitions and to be leaders of their own destiny. As Secretary Rice stated in her recent visit to Beirut, "...[L]ebanese should make decisions for the Lebanese."

A new page has been turned in Lebanon, and the moment for truth has arrived. This time, however, it is the Lebanese who hold the key to unveiling this certainty. Lebanese must be the ones to lead the way toward formulating a national agenda that empowers all citizens regardless of their religious affiliations. What remains to be seen is whether the Lebanese have the courage to risk the comfort of stability secured by the traditional modes of power and enhance a spirit of cooperation that goes beyond sectarian or feudal leaderships.

Today we are honored with the presence of two distinguished panels representing the Bush Administration and regional experts. I look forward to hearing their views on how the United States can best contribute to Lebanon's national development, independence, and sovereignty.

First, I will yield to my friend and colleague, Ranking Democratic Member Tom Lantos, for any opening remarks he may wish to make. I will then ask the Chair and Ranking Democratic Member of the Middle East and Central Asia Subcommittee to extend their one minute opening remarks to two minutes.